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AUTHOR Greenfield, Thomas B.
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ABSTRACT

The theory that organizations are ideological inventions of the human mind is discussed. Organizational science is described as an ideology which is based upon social concepts and experiences. The main justification for organizational theory is that it attempts to answer why we behave as we do in social organizations. Ways in which ideas and concepts shape assumptions about organizations and organizational behavior are presented. For example, social scientists often base their research upon a vision of reality which holds no greater truth than alternate views. Social scientists must understand different individual realities if they are to make generalized statements about the social structure and provide a link between experience and reality. A review of relevant sociological literature by C. Wright Mills, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strauss and others is presented. Particular attention is paid to the writings of Max Weber who maintained that social scientists should be aware of their own values and assumptions in order to guard against self-deception and the deception of others. The conclusion is that organizational theory should consider the nature and objectives of organizations and expand the interpretation of social reality rather than attempting to control it or argue for a single interpretation of that reality. (Author/DB)

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ORGANIZATION THEORY AS IDEOLOGY

Thomas B. Greenfield
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Toronto, Ontario

This paper is about experience and how we come to understand what we do and what is happening to us. It recognizes the placing of meaning upon experience as a bedrock upon which human life is built. Some people invent ideas which give shape and meaning to experience; others borrow those ideas to understand themselves. And many have little or no choice as others' ideas are forced upon them in the same way that the air surrounds them. They must breathe the air or suffocate; so must they accept others' ideas or break through them to a new atmosphere, to other ideas, to a new reality. This context of ideas by which we understand our experience is what I mean by organization. In this sense, organization exists whenever people accept sets of ideas as fit and proper guides for their own behaviour and for that of others. That these ideas may be internally inconsistent and that we cannot always predict what will happen when we act in accordance with them does not remove our dependence upon ideas for ordering our experience and for building an understanding of the world around us.

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Artists have long understood the relation between experience and ideas, between symbol and reality. My dissatisfaction with much of contemporary organization theory--or at least with that form of it which prevails in administrative studies--is that people who call themselves social scientists have come to forget the experiential basis of the ideas they use to interpret reality and have become advocates instead of a particular vision of reality which holds no greater truth than a number of alternate views. And I would go further: Systems theory and structural-functionalist thinking--which I see the ideological hegemony in administrative studies--is demonstrably bad theory and leads to sterile research.

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it is bad theory because organizations are, in Boulding's term 'multi-cephalous,' i.e., they have many brains which sustain mind, meaning, values, and culture. Despite this recognized complexity in organizations, theorists are content to speak about them in terms of primitive models which seldom advance beyond images more complex than the catalogue, the clock, or the gyroscope (Pondy, 1976). As Pondy (1976, p. 16) says, the "dominating" concern of organization theorists over the last decade or more has been "explaining why organizations work well and do good."

I will return to these points again, but let us listen first to what some artists have said on experience and reality. William Blake (quoted in Inglis, 1975) asks:

> What is the price of experience? Do men buy if for a song?
> Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought
> with the price
> Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.

And one of Pirandello's (1954) six characters tells the theatre producer who wants to re-direct his life:

> Each one of us has a whole world of things inside him... And each of us has his own particular world. How can we understand each other if into the words which I speak I put the sense and the value of things as I understand them myself...While at the same time whoever is listening to them inevitably assumes them to have the sense and value that they have for him...The sense and value that they have in the world that he has within him? We think we understand one another...

It seems to me that these questions posed by Blake and Pirandello are inevitable and necessary questions for anyone who wants to understand himself and others, as indeed, they are for the social scientist who wants to understand abstractly and in theoretical terms what social organization is and what it means to people within it.

Let me say something about myself for a moment and about some experiences which now seem enormously significant to me, though they did not at the time of their occurrence, I was born into a farm family in Saskatchewan, Canada and I began formal learning in a school where a single teacher taught many children in eight grades. We used to watch the hands of the clock on the teacher's desk move slowly to four. At that hour, if one were old enough and had no younger brothers or sisters to transport home by buggy or cutter, one might ride home on horseback through an open, unspoiled, tranquil landscape to a homestead that short years before was virgin prairie. At a point of crisis in my family, I went to live in the city. The farm part of my family has never shared my city life, though I can, or could, shift fairly easily back to farm ways. My farm family does not understand what I do as a professor. They would be impressed but incredulous if told that I were in New York at this moment and that people who had travelled far were willing to sit still for twenty minutes while I talked to them. The shift between these separate realities is one that I am coming to understand in Blake's terms: Understanding experience exacts its price and comes only from shifting perspectives, from the juxtaposing of one perspective against another.

I speak in these personal terms to make a point about experience, organizations, and ideology--three words whose meanings, in my view, are closely intertwined. The self that lives by one set of values, by one ideology, within one social organization is not the self that lives by other values, within other ideas, or other organizations, though the same consciousness may connect the two realities. Even more so then, do different people live within different realities. Under these assumptions, the prime task of the social scientist and the theorist of organizations is to understand those realities, if they are to make generalized and abstract statements about them. The ideological or symbolic "explanation" links the experience of individuals and the realities they perceive as social structure.

Poets, saints, charismatic leaders, ideologues, social philosophers, and yes, even organization theorists are important and powerful people because their thoughts can provide the link between experience and reality. The theorists and the symbol-maker are, therefore, linked to those whose lives they explain by a bond which is at once existential and moral. How do we see our life? What place do organizations play in it? What are schools? Can we or our organizations be different? Can we be better, too? How? These are questions which organization theory should speak to and, indeed, does speak to. But it should do so by opening up the interpretation of social reality, not by attempting to fix it or control it. It should make clear the process by which we create our social and organizational world, it should not argue for a single interpretation of what reality. It should leave the persons theorized about with a greater understanding of themselves than before the theorists began their work. These are stringent conditions to lay upon social theorizing, and I am unsure whether much or any of it now lives up to them.

The Individual and Social Reality

Recent writings some by people on this platform, have defined the theoretical issue sharply and clearly for organization studies as they are conducted in educational administration (Crane and Walker, 1976; Gibson, 1977; Greenfield, 1975, 1976; Griffiths, 1975). I do not propose now to re-live old battles or to become nostalgic about them. In this spirit we might consider the words of Iris Murdock in the 1975 Black Papers (Cox and Boyson, 1975, p.7) when she asks the disputants in education issues to:

> use clear ordinary language, not obscure jargon or brutal rhetoric, and keep in mind that while theories are fighting individual children are growing up.

So what is the issue we are talking about here? One cannot go far in organization theory without confronting a basic question:

Why do we behave as we do in social organizations? Answering this question seems to me the main justification for organization theory, since it deals with the individual and social reality. In this paper, therefore, I would like to move on to deal with the implications of a view which sees organizations as ideological inventions of the human mind, as invented social reality. From this point of view, much of received organization theory appears blind to ideology in organizations and in theories about them. It is blind too to the experiential base of ideology and to the struggle of the deviant notion, the radical view and the charismatic vision against a social reality which is routine, patterned, accepted, and considered right and proper. Organizational theory has too frequently defended conventional social realities and ignored the process whereby sets of people and ideas are in contention over what is reality and how one should behave in it.

Goffman (quoted in Manning, 1976, p. 20) gives us a sense of ideological control of the individual when he discusses Grayson Kirk's reaction when students occupied and despoiled his presidential office at Columbia University. "My God", said Kirk, "How could human beings do a thing like this?" But as Goffman points out, the great sociological question is rather, "How it is that human beings do this sort of thing so rarely. How come persons in authority have been so overwhelmingly successful in conning those beneath them into keeping the hell out of their offices?" Social order is maintained therefore, not because of necessary roles and functions operating in some well-working system, but because of ideas in people's minds about how they should treat each other. The social system is therefore not an objective reality, but an ideological social order accepted by individuals or forced upon them. As Goffman says,

> The rules of conduct which bind the actor and the recipient together are the bindings of society... Others who are present constantly remind the individual that he must keep himself together as a well demeaned person and affirm the sacred quality of these others. (Goffman, 1967, p. 90-91).

What we see in the social order depends upon the unit of analysis we choose. A major choice occurs when we choose the individual or the system for this purpose. Parsonians and other functionalists begin with the social system. Some years ago, C. Wright Mills (1959) wrote The Sociological Imagination. I read it as a student in doctoral studies, but soon discarded what it had to say because it appeared too easy to read and too sensible compared with my usual texts. One of the services Mills performs in this book is to translate Parsons. What language Parsons was writing in Mills never says, but he makes it clear that the translation is into plain English. One of these translations runs as follows:

> There are 'social regularities', which we may observe and which are often quite durable. Such enduring and stable regularities I shall call 'structural'. It is possible to think of all these regularities within the social system as a great and intricate balance. That this is a metaphor I am now going to forget, because I want you to take as very real my Concept: The Social equilibrium. (1959, p.32)

Along with the notion of equilibrium in social systems goes the idea of a common core of values. This concept has long appealed to social theorists since Hobbes saw the social contract as the only solution to the "war of all against all". As Zeitlin (1973, p. 42) points out, functionalists who see society as being in equilibrium around a central core of values face some disconcertingly contradictory evidence:

> Are we to believe that in pre-Nazi Germany Junkers, peasants, industrial workers, Catholics, Protestants, Communists, Social Democrats, and Nazis all shared a common value system?

Indeed, can we look at any contemporary society where change and conflict have been so much the order of the day for more than a decade and retain belief in a society ordered around common values?

Social Structure in Terms of Human Meanings

If we reject a superstructure of objective social reality to which individuals must accommodate themselves, what are we left with as an explanation of human personality and group action? The psychological reductionists would offer a set of elemental personal characteristics which our genes or Fortune herself distributes to each of us in some inscrutable process. From these elements, one might then extrapolate the individual personality and ultimately the quality of social institutions. Both Weber and Durkheim reject such arguments by pointing to the fact that the meaning of such presumed psychological elements or "laws" based upon them cannot be deduced without invoking meanings already existing in the social context (Eldridge, 1970, pp. 17-18). For example, while some psychologists might claim that intelligence is operationally and independently defined in the Binet scale, the human sociologist points out that Binet's first step in building the scale was to ask teachers in a Paris school near his laboratory what they thought intelligence was and which of their pupils had it.

For Weber, then, the necessary unit for analyzing self and society is the individual human being. All explanations of social and personal phenomena must rest upon subjective meanings which appear 'adequate' to the individual (Weber, 1947, pp. 88-100). The task of those who would explain human action and social forms therefore becomes the 'interpretation' of human meanings. Weber also recognizes that interpretation of meanings alone will not suffice if we are to understand social phenomena in 'causally adequate' terms. The theorist must show how people typically construe social situations and how these constructions have consequences for themselves and for others.

> Interpretive sociology considers the individual and his action as the basic unit, as its 'atom'...In this

> approach, the individual is also the upper limit and the sole carrier of meaningful conduct....In general, for sociology, such concepts as 'state,' 'assocation,' 'feudalism,' and the like, designate certain categories of human interaction. Hence it is the task of sociology to reduce these concepts to 'understandable' action, that is, without exception, to the actions of participating individual men. (Weber quoted in Gerth and Mills, 1958, P. 55)

This Weberian rationale for an interpretative sociology has important implications for the question of whether a value-free social science is possible, and it also raises a number of methodological questions. But the important point to emphasize in the present discussion is that organization theorists are cognitively and epistemologically bound by the same rules, possibilities, and limitations as the persons whose actions they are trying to explain. If we see theorists as trying to make sense of the social world by reducing it to generalities, rules, and abstractions, the Weberian assumptions force us to recognize that this process is the same one which goes on as Everyman attempts to make sense of his world in ideational terms. If Everyman's ideas, beliefs, hopes, and fears are his ideology, so also are those intellectual artifacts we call organization theories the ideology of the theorists. Human sociologists and theorists working under the assumptions of a Weberian interpretative sociology ask only that the theorists' 'explanations' of human behaviour make sense in terms of a 'real' if subjective world in which people live and find their being. Though life itself and that in organizations is filled with contending ideologies, the quality of organization theory should clarify the process of contention--the rules and consequences of the battle. It should not constitute another position in the battle and it should not present the view of its winning general as good, 'functional,' or inevitable. Too frequently in the past, organization and administrative theory has--wittingly or not--taken sides in the ideological battles of social process and presented as 'theory'

the views of a dominating set of values, the views of rulers, elites, and their administrators (Kiffel, 1977.) The same criticism can be made about curriculum theory and the decision-makers who define what is to be accepted as knowledge by the schools (Young, 1971).

The assumptions of interpretative social theory do not deny the biological and physical conditions of the human condition. They merely require that we attempt to 'understand' such conditions as people themselves do. As Goffman points out, physical and biological 'facts' mean little compared to the social rituals we weave around them:

> A person with carcinoma of the bladder can, if he wants, die with more social grace and propriety, more apparent inner social normalcy, than a man with a harelip can order a piece of apple pie. (Quoted in Manning, 1976, P.20)

And for those who still resist accepting individuals and their ideas as both the focal point of social reality and its limit, Mead's social psychology provides a rationale in which thinking becomes an internal dialectic whereby the human organism adapts to its environment. (Berlak and Berlak, 1975, pp. 9-13). Thinking and being are thereby adaptive responses to environment, and primacy for explanation rests with the internal dialectic rather than with objective conditions. Mead's concept of the 'generalized other' thus becomes an explanation of how society exists in the human mind. We now need not see man in society, but only society in man. (Strauss, 1956). The generalized other is thus only the part of 'me' which expresses others' norms, values and beliefs, though individuals see them as their own acts (Berlak and Berlak, 1975. p. 11).

Values and Methodology

It is abundantly clear that Weber regarded value-free social

science as an impossibility (Zeitlin, p. 58; Eldridge/Weber, 1970, pp. 11-14). So Bendix points out:

> In fact, Weber made it clear that 'no science is absolutely free from presuppositions, and no sicence can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these presuppositions.' (Weber quoted in Bendix and Roth, 1971, p. 71).

This paper has argued the same position, as does one of Pirandello's six characters when he says:

> But a fact is like a sack...When it's empty it won't stand up. And in order to make it stand up you must first of all pour into it all the reasons and all the feelings which have caused it to exist. (Pirandello, p. 24).

Weber requires of social scientists that they be aware of their own values, their own assumptions. As Bendix notes, "These are minimal demands against self-deception and the deception of others (Bendix and Roth, 1971, p. 71). This view sets Weber apart from Marx who taught that correct scientific inquiry could reveal an objective social structure against which individuals' subjective meanings might be seen as 'false consciousnes In this belief, Marx is apparently joined by many contemporary social scientists who regard theory as a super-reality which only the enlightened may be expected to understand.

Weber's method is to create images of reality as actors in social settings understand it and to show how action consistent with these images has consequences--expected or unexpected. Understanding comes from setting the images against each other. The images may come from different people at one point in time for from different vantage points over time. In this way Weber strives to build explanations which are both 'meaningfully' and 'causally' adequate. The explanations have both meaning for the actors and consistency in a logical causal sense. The method

is akin to cinematography where discrete images on film create a point of view and show why events in the action turn out as they do. But is the point of view that of the actors of or the photographer. Antonioni's film, Blow Up, presents this idea as an artistic image. In this film a photographer who is accustomed to using his subjects as objects for his purposes and profit sneaks up to take pictures of a couple in a park. They walk in conversation, seem to embrace briefly, and then move on. When they spot the photographer, they object to his picture taking. He returns to his dark room and develops the prints. What has he seen? Was it innocent love or was he witnessing a murder in progress? He blows up the pictures and parts of them again and again hoping that enlargement will answer the question of what was going on. Ultimately the images must speak for themselves through any hypothesis which the photographer or we as observers can reasonably place upon them.

Nisbet (1967, P. 259) highlights the strength of this method in the hands of a scholar like Weber. In explaining the relationship between Calvinsim and the capitalist temper Weber contrasts the "paradox of the presence of a manifest capitalist spirit" in the "backwoods circumstances of eighteenth-century America and, conversely, the lack of such a spirit in affluent, bourgeois Florence." He quotes from Weber:

> Now, how could activity, which was at best ethically tolerated, turn into a calling in the sense of Benjamin Franklin? The fact to be explained historically is that the most highly capitalistic center of that time, in Florence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the money and capital market of all the great political Powers, this attitude was considered ethically unjustifiable, or at best to be tolerated. But in the backwoods small bourgeois circumstances of Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, where business threatened for simple lack of money to fall back into barter, where there was hardly a sign of large enterprise, where only the earliest beginnings of banking were to be found, the same thing was considered the essence of moral conduct,

> even commanded in the name of duty. To speak here of a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense. (Weber in Nisbet, 1967, pp. 259-260.)

In the study of organizations generally and of the schools in particular, Weber is usually quoted in the section on 'theoretical framework' and ignored thereafter in the methodology of the study. Some empirical work on schools using other than social systems or reductionist theories are beginning to come forward. Work by Berlak and Berlak (1975), Wolcott (1973), and Cusick (1973), are but some examples. Part of our difficulty in this respect comes from our ideological difficulties in recognizing research. We have so schooled ourselves to see statistically sophisticated but--in Weber's terms--meaningless studies as research that we are willing and even eager to accept their tiny but neatly packaged 'findings' as knowledge.

We should now begin to look also at wholly new kinds of routes to knowledge about schools and organizations. The 'controlled,' highly empirical study is not the only road to truth about organizations. Reading--or better still--seeing Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author and The Balcony by Genet may make us think of new roads to truth, as reflection upon our own life and experience might do. We should be experiencing Miss White's second grade class with Mirian Wasserman (1974) and listening to the Schoolboys of Barbiana (1970) explain to their teacher what school is like to them. And we might ask with James Herndon (1971) why his six year old son going to a 'good' school burst into unconsolable tears when he once forgot his homework. Or we might discover with Herndon again what happens when some teachers behave as though everyone in the 'dumb class' can and must read.

Conclusion

We live in separate realities. But we live with each other. The line of reasoning in this paper implies that we need to engage in a continuing process of discovery aimed at gaining understanding of ourselves and of others--a process aimed at understanding social reality and its artifacts we call organizations. We need to move from the conviction that there is only one social reality to a recognition of the possibility that many exist. How we are to understand and appreciate these alternate perspectives as theorists and as human beings is not altogether clear. I have suggested the juxtsposition of meaning-laden but disparate images as a method which is both powerful and promising.

What is W. H. Auden saying about school now and then in this image of reconstructed reality?

> Dare any call Permissiveness
> An educational success?
> Saner those class-rooms which I sat in,
> Compelled to study Greek and Latin.
>
> (Epistle to a Godson, 1972, quoted in Cox and Boyson, 1975.)

And what do the Schoolboys of Barbina tell us when they object to a teacher's complaint that their past instruction contained no 'Physical Education.'

> Anyone of us could climb an oak tree. Once up there we could let go with both hands and chop off a two-hundred pound branch with a hatchet. Then we could drag it through the snow to our mother's doorstep.
>
> I heard of a gentleman in Florence who rides upstairs in his house in an elevator. But then he has bought himself an expensive gadget and pretends to row in it. You would give him an A in Physical Education.

Few if any of the ideas in this paper are new. But some of

them are new to me. By my standards then that puts them into Eleanor Duckworth's (1973) category of 'wonderful ideas' which have to do with insight and experience. The importance of such ideas is simply that we have them and can use them. Piaget recounts (Duckworth, 1973, p. 263) the experience of a mathematician. As a child, he put ten pebbles in a row. He counted them left to right. Ten. He counted them right to left. Ten. "He kept rearranging and counting them until he decided that, no matter what the arrangement, he was always going to find that there were ten. Number is independent of the order of counting." That this theorem is not new makes no difference to the person discovering it. What matters in this context is the intellectual development of the child and his freedom to have such 'wonderful ideas.' My concern in organization theory is that we are restricting one another's thinking by insisting on searching for universal truths which fit within a framework which is narrower than the reality it is trying to represent.

We have been caught in a trap which requires us in the name of theory to hold a single image up to reality and test whether it is true--or at least whether it is a 'better' and more accurate representation of reality than any other image. But what is truth and falsity in social reality? If we are to understand organizations as containing multiple meanings, we must abandon the search for a single best image of it and recognize, as an examination of great theorists' images of society reveals (Zeitlin, 1968, p. 322), that the study of organizations can best advance by admitting multiple realities and multiple expressions of it. A number of contemporary scholars now accept this position (Pondy and Boje, 1976) and argue that such a shift requires us to abandon the attempt to construct a value-free theory of social reality. Instead we must recognize social and organizational theories as expressions of ideology and as moral judgments about the world. Then various theoretical insights might all co-exist simultaneously, since theories would no longer be "competing for the single prize of being the most-nearly-true (Pondy and Boje, 1976, p. 2) In

judging theories, as we would no doubt continue to do, we would therefore recognize that we were involved in a truth-making and essentially moral task within a disciplined process of inquiry into social reality.

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